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## NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

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THE LIFE OF EDWARD BULWER, FIRST LORD LYTTON. By THE EARL OF LYTTON. London: The Macmillan Company, Limited, 1913.

From one point of view the long-awaited *Life of Bulwer Lytton* is somewhat disappointing. It is, indeed, a little surprising that the biography of so brilliant and active a man as the author of *The Last Days of Pompeii* and *Zanoni*—one feels tempted to add, in early nineteenth-century fashion, “etc., etc.”—should afford so little that is of direct worth to thought or to feeling. For the *Life* does not contain much that a man can profitably translate into the terms of his own experience. The expressions of feeling in Bulwer’s correspondence leave us cold; the truths he found appear never to have been especially deep or subtle. It seems as though in the course of his busy, troublous, ambitious life, he never had time—if he had capacity—for those deeper moments of consciousness in which are matured our more sincere and profound thoughts. One does not see him experiencing those changes of heart which come to a man when he has been wrestling with his own soul in the dark. On the contrary, there is a kind of rigid consistency about him. He is offended, he relents; he acts, in short, with a magnanimity and generosity uncommon in the most gentle of men. But in all this process there is nothing to prevent him from being a second time offended in precisely the same way as before. He seems to *concede*—not to forgive. When he is moved he expands with a kind of elaborate effusiveness; yet making all due allowance for the epistolary style of his day, it strikes one that he never gets to the root even of his own feeling. No man was more adept at stating the logical grounds of his emotion: he seems not to have suspected that these were not uniformly—as they so seldom are—the real grounds.

In considering this aspect of Bulwer, it is, of course, impossible not to have in mind his bitter marital unhappiness. Poor Rosina Wheeler! Hers was evidently one of those complex minds which can be governed to good purposes only by the most careful and intimate self-control; and this sovereign quality she had less than the average chance to acquire. After an embittered childhood, inexperienced in the realities of affection, lacking that spirit of respect and reverence which wise love inspires, she faced the world in the frame of mind most perilous to one of her temperament—that of requiring from life compensation for all she had missed or suffered. Nothing, perhaps, more completely hoodwinks the soul than the belief that deprivation or injustice relieves the sufferer from responsibility. Yet the earlier references to Rosina Wheeler, in the *Life*, give us glimpses of a personality attractive and by no means unamiable. Bulwer’s infatuation for Miss Wheeler was vigorously combated by his mother, and when

at length he married without his mother's consent she retaliated by cutting off his allowance. Under these difficult circumstances, the young wife appears, by her letters, to have behaved with surprising discretion. At that time she felt that her husband was all hers; that he was upon her side in any quarrel that might arise even when the other party was his mother. The chivalry of his behavior won Rosina, we may read between the lines, as nothing else could have done; it won her even to moderation and generosity. But this could not last. As Bulwer became more and more absorbed in his literary work, arriving in time at a state of almost chronic author's irritability, his wife lapsed deeper and deeper into dissatisfaction and jealousy.

When we turn from Rosina to her husband—what a contrast! Bulwer seems the embodiment of reasonableness and self-restraint, his wife ungovernable and always hopelessly in the wrong. We cannot, truly, deny that Bulwer possessed self-command in an unusual degree. His strength excites our admiration, yet there was a weakness in it, and the symptom of this weakness is a thing which for lack of a better name we may call "the rhetorical process." The rhetorical process is the attempt of the mind to get along without the will, and it begins where self-control ends. It consists of elaborate and unnecessary self-vindications, of definitions of one's attitude, of declarations of what one would or would not do under certain unreal circumstances, of vain speculations upon serious matters. Giving way to this process, a man may be as ingenious as Polonius, and will be in all probability as futile. He will certainly miss the heart of every matter. Every one who has succumbed to the temptation of writing an elaborate reply to an impertinent letter knows the rhetorical process. The mental act of writing the unnecessary reply is a substitute for the spiritual act of dropping the letter into the waste-basket and forgetting the incident as soon as possible.

Bulwer's frequent yielding to this rhetorical tendency seems to betoken a weakness not so different from that of his wife as might at first blush appear to be the case. Doubtless in any event Rosina would have proved a discontented and trying wife, but, as it was, she became a paranoiac. If her husband had possessed a deeper, a more spiritual self-control, the awfulness of the tragedy might have been averted. Rosina's violence was perhaps an instinctive effort to provoke from the man whom, in her way, she loved the unqualified love she craved. But Bulwer always qualified, and then qualified the qualifications. If only he had not tried to do by logic what could only be done by will and instinct! In their frequent abrupt quarrels and reconciliations it is curious to observe the automatic workings of the minds of both. Plainly the will is not present here. Will—the will that precedes judgment and makes it possible—that is what we all need.

The Earl of Lytton rather acutely points out a weakness of his grandfather's in constantly confusing his ideal of himself with the true man. Edward Bulwer Lytton himself declared that a man might become almost what he liked. So saying, he "spoke a great word and fulfilled it." Few men have so fully accomplished what they set out to do in the world as did he, and in this respect his life yields direct inspiration. But his career seems also to illustrate the deeper truth that it is a mistake to substitute an outward ideal for the instinct that should inform and correct it.

In most ways the biography confirms the opinion of Bulwer that may be drawn from his own writings. It does not lead us to attribute to him greater depth of imagination, but rather a greater preponderance of good sense over fancy and feeling than the novels might be thought to indicate. For example, his interest in the occult was coolly skeptical and his final attitude toward the subject was almost explicitly that of the modern, disillusioned though puzzled psychic investigator. His political effectiveness, his oratorical brilliance, the versatile activity of his mind as shown in his letters, are all just what we should expect.

Further, this should be said: the *Life* gives us finally a substantial respect for the man of whom it treats. Bulwer had no such genius for self-pity as Rousseau, as Byron, or even as Dickens. He cannot at once disgust and attract, and by so much he seems the more manly. His character has the dignity of honorable ambition, if not of devotion to art in the highest sense. It has the magnetism of keen intellect if not of those deep, whole-souled natures we call greatest—and in the long run it commands respect. As a piece of writing, the *Life* is as clean, straightforward, and interesting as Forster's *Dickens*.

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THE LIFE OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE. By SIR EDWARD COOK. London: The Macmillan Company, Limited, 1913.

The desire to know how greatness of character originates can never be fully satisfied; yet in the life of such a woman as Florence Nightingale—a life in which we see character developing as an independent force—we seem to get a certain light upon the mystery. Do heredity and environment furnish the all-sufficient explanations? Cases of eccentric or extremely specialized genius sometimes lead us to think so. Emerson, we remember, had as much hereditary right to metaphysical insight as any seventh son of a seventh son to occult powers. Similar cases of inherited tendencies are not hard to find. But what of Florence Nightingale?

Some of her traits may be easily accounted for. Kindness of heart, gentleness of soul, mental acuteness, belonged to her by heritage. But none of her family ever displayed the wonderful force of character and initiative that were hers. Considering as a whole her busy, eventful, compassionate life, we are constrained to regard her as one of nature's fresh starts—a successful attempt to produce a new and higher type of human being. Among founders of families and originators of new movements, such persons are occasionally met with, and they are always sharply differenced from those who are distinguished merely by that intensity which results from narrowness.

That Florence Nightingale was not one of the narrowly intense is proved by the story of her early life—her period of aspiration. She was well equipped to shine in society—and in society of the brilliantly intellectual sort which was open to her she unfeignedly delighted. But she put it aside. So original was she in thought and expression that unquestionably she might have won notable success in literature. The literary career was repeatedly urged upon her; but she put it aside in favor of a way of life that involved, besides great labor, stubborn conflict with conventional opinion, with military prejudice, with medical jealousy, and with religious intolerance. Plainly she was not one of those women who are